

Chennai start-up Ather tools up premium e-bike



Swapnil Jain



Tarun Mehta

Bike expected to be lighter and faster, with longer battery life.

Chennai, May 8:

Ather Energy is a start-up based in Chennai with a vision to design premium electric two-wheelers for the Indian market. Housed at IIT Madras Research Park, Ather's young owners, alumni of the prestigious institute, want to change the lacklustre image associated with the current crop of battery-operated scooters (e-bikes). They want to offer a bike that brings out all the positives of an electric vehicle and matches the performance of gasoline scooters, needs zero maintenance and is topped with premium features not yet available in any Indian scooter. Tarun Mehta, who founded the start-up with his batchmate, Swapnil Jain, isn't satisfied with the current crop of battery-operated scooters.

"The existing e-bikes fall way short of expectations when it comes to performance, reliability, range of battery and charging time. We want to build a scooter that does not compromise on any of these parameters."

Emphasis is on in-house development as this allows Ather to implement quality and cost controls effectively. "We have outsourced fabrication of the design to a private garage in Ambattur. Everything else associated with the scooter is our responsibility," says Mehta. The duo plans to launch the e-bike around 2015.

“Our scooter will have the capacity to out-accelerate normal petrol scooters while not compromising on comfort due to better suspension. We are using better technology with the battery, which will ensure its longer life,” he says.

These e-bikes will be much lighter than other e-bikes due to minimal ‘unsprung mass’. The weight of the wheels, tyres and brakes are considered to be the unsprung mass of a vehicle and Mehta says they have succeeded reducing its weight by as much as 70 per cent. This makes manoeuvring easier and suits city riding better.

Expected to cost around ₹85,000, Ather Energy has cast its eyes on the premium segment. “People who buy electric scooters aren’t necessarily looking at a low-cost alternative to the petrol scooter. They are looking for a green alternative, something that would make them stand out in a crowd,” he says. Besides, ownership costs on these bikes will be low due to the better battery life, lower charging time and the performance, he added.

Development is still at its nascent stage; the final prototype is months away from road testing. Ather Energy, founded in October 2013, began work on the product in February, and is banking on an electric future for the two-wheeler industry.

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